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LDP Factional Maneuvers Key to General Election

The general election scheduled for December 18 is only the first step in a process that will require at least another year before Japan's outstanding domestic political issues are resolved. The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) should retain its majority in the Diet's Lower House, affording Prime Minister Nakasone an opportunity to expand his power base and retain the premiership. But the fundamental question of Kakuei Tanaka's future role is not likely to be settled, in spite of its being the centerpiece of the election.

Most of Japan's Lower House election districts send multiple members to the Diet. In these districts, where the top three to five vote-getters win election, a key element for any party is determining the optimum number of candidates to run. Overloading ballots can dilute votes, resulting in losses for the party. Similarly, a failure to capitalize on party popularity within a district can lose the party seats it would otherwise have won.

In all, an unusually large number of candidates from all parties -- 848 -- are competing for 511 seats. The LDP finds itself with an overabundance of candidates, and from the party's perspective, too many of them may be competing against one another within districts, risking a loss of more than the 15 to 20 seats that most observers currently anticipate.

At this point, candidate endorsements enter into the picture. The national party organization traditionally endorses candidates in different prefectures based on political judgments as to each candidate's "electability" and the party's overall strength within the district. Not all affiliated candidates are endorsed. A local candidate's stature is generally enhanced by such endorsements, which also carry with them additional campaign funds from Tokyo. Endorsements are made at the last possible moment in a campaign, meaning a final influx of influence, prestige and finances at the prefectural level just before voters go to the polls.

Endorsements can mean the difference in a candidate's chances of being elected to the Diet. Observers of the Japanese political system estimate that the party endorsement can mean as many as 25,000 additional votes, a significant number in light of the diffused votes in multi-member districts. Officially endorsed candidates also are better placed to receive prime party and government positions once they reach Tokyo.

So far as Mr. Nakasone is concerned, the LDP endorsement process would have given him an opportunity to expand his influence while diluting Tanaka's. However, the Tanaka faction has played the predominant role in the LDP's endorsement committee up to this point. Nakasone has given way to Tanaka rather than risk a political confrontation, and as a consequence, Tanaka faction members and supporters might be able to extract a large share of the LDP endorsements.

Even if the LDP loses seats on December 18, as is expected, the Tanaka faction probably will remain the strongest in the party owing to the endorsement process, Tanaka's personal influence and the strength of the faction's election finances. Thus, the question of what role Kakuei Tanaka will play in Japanese politics will remain unresolved even after the elections. And although the Tanaka faction will remain one of the strongest in the Diet, its actions will be limited by several factors. Tanaka will be appealing his bribery conviction; there is no strong successor within the faction to succeed Tanaka; and the other factions remain strong enough only to oppose the Tanaka/Nakasone/Suzuki alliance, not to displace it.

Nakasone and Tanaka thus remain tied to one another for the immediate future; without Tanaka's support, Nakasone cannot remain in office. Mr. Nakasone, however, wields considerable influence by virtue of his office and is

in a position to enhance his stature sufficiently to win the LDP presidential election scheduled for November 1984. It appears that Nakasone's strategy calls for allowing the Tanaka faction leeway while using the December elections to form the necessary alliances to assure his victory in the party presidential election. Since that post is tantamount to attaining the premiership, the 1984 election is at least as important as the general elections scheduled this month in terms of party and factional politics.

Opposition parties are making government ethics the principal issue in the election, trying to take advantage of the Tanaka bribery conviction to increase their representation in the Diet. If voters agree that political ethics are the key concern, it follows that the party most likely to benefit from public sentiment is Komeito, the "clean government" party. Opposition forces, however, are not well organized and must fight the prime minister's personal popularity which, while not sufficient to prevent the LDP from losing a limited number of seats, is still strong enough to convince many voters to overlook Tanaka's transgressions.

Election-year turnover will be another factor in the elections. In the last Lower House elections in 1980, only three Diet members resigned rather than run for election. To date, 38 incumbents have resigned and 13 others died while in office. Furthermore, an average of 90 incumbents lose reelection bids in an average year, according to one study of Japanese elections. If this pattern holds, it will mean that fully 20 percent of the Diet will be new the next time it convenes. This could give Nakasone an opportunity to bring members within his circle, separating himself from the Tanaka umbilical cord.

Recent polls indicate slight declines in public support for Nakasone. A survey by Asahi Shimbun released on December 5 showed support dropping from 51 percent to 48 percent. The Japanese Socialist Party (JSP) was the closest individual party to the LDP with 19 percent, although total support for all opposition parties was 41 percent. The LDP won its current number of seats in 1980 with just over 48 percent of the total vote, but it did not face the same problems it does now.

Subtle maneuvers are underway within the LDP to create public impressions of what constitutes an LDP "victory" or "defeat" in the elections. As the leader of his party, Prime Minister Nakasone is viewed as personally responsible for its performance in the elections. A poor showing would reflect upon his leadership capabilities and his desirability as LDP president. Nakasone opponents are therefore suggesting that a loss of any more than 20 seats would constitute a defeat for the party. Former prime minister Fukuda, a staunch opponent of the Tanaka/Nakasone/Suzuki alliance, has gone so far as to claim that losing even a single seat would be detrimental to the LDP. Nakasone has taken the other extreme, stating that he seeks primarily to retain a majority in the Lower House -- just 256 seats. If the LDP wins any more than that -- as most observers now expect -- he would be able to claim victory in the face of adversity to justify his hold on the party presidency.

Nakasone himself apparently is confident of a good showing by the LDP in December and of his ability to retain the party presidency the following November. The LDP is entering the December campaign with an unusually sound

base. Its showing in 1980 was surprisingly strong and the party cannot be expected to record the same strength this time around. The large number of seats it now holds gives it limited room for losses this month while allowing the principal political figures in the country the opportunity to further their political aims.

Party Candidates, 1983

Party	Total Number of Candidates	Previous Election	Number of Seats in Lower House
Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)	337	310	286
Japan Socialist Party (JSP)	144	149	101
Clean Government Party (Komeito)	59	64	34
Democratic Socialist Party (DSP)	54	50	31
Japan Communist Party (JCP)	129	129	29
New Liberal Club	17	25	10
Shakairen	4	5	3
Minor parties	18	42	0
Independents	86	61	4
Total	848	835	498

Note: There are currently 13 vacant seats in the Lower House.

Michael Chinworth

Election: Where Have All the Economic Problems Gone?

The political vacuum induced by the dissolution of the Diet will postpone important policy decisions, including those necessary to sustain Japan's economic upturn. As a result, government officials are making sure that economic management policies are in place in the month of December in order to assist domestic growth. In the area of public works spending, the government will accelerate scheduled public works programs to assist in natural-disaster relief projects. As mandated in the comprehensive economic package, it will spend 75 percent of the total budget in this fiscal year. Depressed-area spending programs will also be expanded and local governments will be expected to assist the central government in this effort.

On the financial front, monetary authorities will continue to pursue policies designed to expand lending activity. Toward the end of this year, a planned expansion of three government financial institutions is scheduled, and private banks and lending institutions have already announced funding of about $26 billion for small and medium-size businesses.

As a consequence of the Lower House elections, the government cannot prepare the FY 1984 budget until next year. The Ministry of Finance is planning to release its draft in the middle of January -- and is likely to continue its emphasis on curbing expenditures. According to economists, since FY 1984 is the first year of the proposed fiscal reform program, the government is obliged to carry out budget cuts in all areas except revenue-sharing to

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